1: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

CHAPTER TWO

Social Structure

596
564
621

To understand the social structure of an Indian village it is necessary to examine the various units through which the village community is organized. The basic and primary unit of the society is the elementary or joint family. Every family belongs to an exogamous division of a caste and several such divisions constitute an endogamous caste or an endogamous section of a large caste. Only excommunication or a change of religion can alter the position of the individual in any such social units. On the other hand, every family belongs to the community with whom it shares a settlement site, be it a village or a hamlet attached to a village. In socio-religious affairs, control of the individual is threefold—that of his family, his village and his caste. Often it is only the independent, endogamous division of the caste which takes cognizance of offences and penalizes erring members, and not the caste as a whole. On the other hand, very serious cases or matters concerning more than one village may be heard and decided by a larger judicial organ, comprising members of all the constituent villages. The structure and organization of the family, as well as the criterion of status differentiation in the community, can best be described in a separate chapter; here we shall examine the division of the community into castes, and follow it up by an analysis of the internal organization of the village with special reference to authority and the machinery regulating the administration of justice in the village.

1. CASTE IN THE VILLAGE COMMUNITY

563

The Hindus and the Muslims constitute two distinct sections in the population of Shamirpet. Although long residence and close

1: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

if one of his caste fellows fails to fulfil the terms of his obligations or in any other way brings dishonour to the caste; if boys get unmanageable or girls earn an evil reputation for easy virtue, he effectively enters the scene, gives suggestions and advice, admonishes people if they do not seem amenable to persuasion, and in the case of adolescents and young boys may even inflict light corporal punishment. In his dealings with people E. D. R. possesses some dramatic qualities which make him something of a hero to his people. With his great influence in the counsels of the village he commands obedience from his own caste fellows as well as from many others. V. P. R., in a sense E. D. R.'s rival, has also a strong personality, and although he is not the recognized head of the caste he exercises considerable control over 'his area of influence'. Because of his influence he is one of those who are invited to participate in the deliberations of the *panchayat*. However, the two men exercise considerable tact in dealing with each other, and so far there has been no effective challenge to the position of E. D. R. The position of the head in a caste is what its holder chooses to make it. Ambitious rivals can steal some of his light and authority. If he proves unsuitable he may for all practical purposes be superseded by someone who is abler or more ambitious and aggressive.

The structure of the family and part played by the 'head' in its affairs will be analysed in a subsequent chapter. It will suffice here to point out that the type of family organization in Shamirpet and the neighbouring rural areas is patrilineal and patrilocal. Joint families are regarded as ideal, although there is a tendency for sons to separate after marriage, and brothers almost always separate some time after the father's death. The eldest male is generally regarded as the chief of the household, and, according to tradition, he must benevolently dominate the scene. Younger members of the household must show respect to him and his wishes. In his turn the head of the family should treat his brothers or sons equally, 'as alike as his two eyes'. A serious socio-religious offence committed by one member of the family would result in the excommunication of the whole family. As such the head of the family must watch the actions of all the members of his household and advise, warn or admonish them according to the necessity of the situation. The head of the family is answerable to the caste and the village councils for the members of his household, and this

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

entitles him to maintain a controlling hand in domestic affairs. In the case of the head of the family also, much depends on the character and personality of the individual concerned. An irresponsible head who becomes a liability to the members of his family forfeits his claim to their obedience and respect, and in such cases the sympathy of the village people is generally given to the dissenting members of the family. Even after separation it is good form to treat the elders with courtesy and respect. On the occasions of family reunions, such as those connected with the crises of life or with the annual offering of water to the spirits of the deceased, it is the eldest member of the family who occupies the dominant position. In general, even after separation his help is sought in cases of disease and difficulty, and in all matters involving priority of one or the other, preference is always given to the elder. The exact position of the head of the family would, however, vary according to the equations of different families, with which we propose to deal later.

The Deshmukh also figures at the head of the government or semi-government village officials, whose relative positions can be arranged in a tabular form as follows:

DESHMUKH
[Combining the offices of Mali Patel and Police Patel]

Sub-Inspector of Police
Head Constables
Masters
Constables

Patwari

FOURTEEN VILLAGE MENIALS

i. Kawalkar	viii. Kammari
ii. Talari	ix. Kummari
iii. Majkuri	x. Sakali
iv. Neerudi	xi. Mangali
v. Begari	xii. Ausula
vi. Yetti	xiii. Dappu
vii. Wadla	xiv. Kommu

The Deshmukh is the recognized headman of the village. Two hundred and ten acres of rent-free land, the normal revenue of which would have been Rs. 556/6/-, have been granted to him by the State. He also formally holds the offices of Mali Patel and Police Patel; in the former capacity he assists the government officials in the collection of land revenue, in the latter he helps the police in the maintenance of law and order. The Deshmukh used to cultivate the rent-free land earmarked by the government for persons working in these two capacities, but he had delegated his powers

1: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

a number of years, according to law he acquires semi-proprietary rights over them. The landlord does not want this to happen, and so with a view to safeguarding his own interests he leases out his land to different persons in different years. A short-term lease is naturally not conducive to land improvement, for the person cultivating the land does not risk any investment in it. If he does improve it, in one of the following years the landlord may lease it out to someone else who offers to pay more than the person who improved the land. Secondly, those who hold most of the agricultural land in the village are interested in maintaining a supply of cheap agricultural labour, without which it would be impossible for them to cultivate their extensive fields. They benefit more by cultivating their land with the help of this labour, than by leasing out their land. If they leased out all their surplus land the cheap labour supply would appreciably diminish, and for want of competition wages of those who were still available would rise. To avoid this they choose to leave some of their land uncultivated, and thus we have the paradox of having in the same village many land-hungry families and several hundred acres of uncultivated land.

The land belongs to the family, and normally the head of the family exercises control over it. On the death of the father, the land and other agricultural property—such as tools, implements and livestock—are distributed equally among the brothers. Provision is made for the marriage of unmarried daughters as well as for the maintenance of the minor sons of the deceased. In very special cases, with the consent of all the brothers, a widowed sister is also given a small share. But this is a gratuity rather than a rightful share.

The agriculturists have considerable sentiment for their land and cattle. If adversity compels them to sell some of their fields or cattle, the day when this is done becomes a day of semi-mourning for the household. The hour of transfer is indeed a sad one, and the farmer will complete the necessary formalities with a heavy heart. For several days the family atmosphere remains overcast with gloom. The womenfolk may even wail and shed tears of real grief. In the sentiments of an Indian peasant, the Earth occupies a mother's position and parting with a fragment of it is nearly tantamount to separation from the mother. It is surprising how cattle become almost members of the agriculturist's family, and how

1: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

CHAPTER FIVE

The Web of Family Ties

In the social structure of Indian village communities the family occupies by far the most important place. It derives its significance not merely from its economic functions and its dominant role as an agency of socialization and social control, but its ritual importance is also very great to the average Hindu.

Classical Hinduism has prescribed four stages of life: celibacy (*brahmacharya*), family life (*grahastha ashrama*), resignation (*vanaprastha*) and renunciation (*sanyas*). In the first stage a person acquires concentration by controlling his instincts and impulses so that he may be able to dedicate himself to the pursuit of learning. This is the formative period of life, and in it a man is expected to equip himself for the proper discharge of his social responsibilities. In the second stage he enters life and begins to share his social obligations. Now he must marry and beget children. This is the creative period and covers a very considerable part of a man's life. The last two are the contemplative stages. As a preparation for the ultimate renunciation of worldly goods and worldly connections, he should first cultivate an attitude of detachment and devote himself to reflection. When this has been achieved, the time will have come for him to renounce formally all his possessions and relations. In contemporary rural India very few people can understand or explain the social philosophy that lies behind this system of *ashramas* or the 'stages of life', but its essence has reached them for countless generations through oral tradition and through the teachings of numerous saint-poets and has thus become ingrained in their thought-pattern and value-structure. Sex indulgence among children is socially disapproved in the Indian countryside. Marriage is universally regarded as

1: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

natural and necessary. Only morons and cripples remain single. Though it is rare for people to renounce their home and property in old age, old men and women excessively attached to material goods come in for a good deal of criticism, and people often remark about them, 'Will they carry their wealth with them to the other world when they die?' It is at this time that their thoughts turn more to religion and to the destiny of their souls in the future life, and it is now that they generally undertake pilgrimages to holy places. In a sense the broad essentials of the philosophy of the *ashramas* can be said to permeate the life and thought of the Hindu villagers. The village Muslims share these social attitudes with their Hindu neighbours. With conversion to Islam they have changed their religious faith, but in the socio-cultural spheres of life they still continue to have more or less the same basic attitudes as the Hindus. In their family ethics and ideals the two groups demonstrate considerable similarity.

To the village people the necessity of both marriage and family is self-evident. It is necessary that the family line should be continued. A male heir must be left. An unmarried person past the marriage age is an object of pity. A couple without a son are unhappy. Childlessness and inability to produce a male child on the part of a woman often lead to a polygynous household. Marriage is regarded as essential among all the castes and social groups in the village. In a community of 2,494 persons, demographic survey reveals the presence of only two single persons—both women. One of these is a deaf-mute; the other has been a victim of epileptic fits from her childhood and has in addition the unenviable reputation of being a thief. For the clean-caste Hindus the continuity of the family line is necessary for a further reason. A male child must make a ceremonial offering of water to the spirits of his deceased parents and ancestors, without which their souls may not have peace. The untouchable castes as well as the semi-tribal groups also have this ritual in a modified form. The Muslims neither have this belief nor any attendant ritual, but they too share with the Hindus the sentiment against childlessness.

1. THE STRUCTURE OF THE FAMILY

The patrilineal and patrilocal elementary or joint family is the normal type of family unit met with in this part of rural India.

1: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

WEB OF FAMILY TIES

When a son-in-law settles with his wife's parents, we occasionally get examples of matrilocal residence. But this is rare and is largely confined to the cases of a few orphans and children of very poor parents who take recourse to the method of suitor service for securing a wife and then continue to live with their parents-in-law. The joint family is approved by social tradition. The following table illustrates an ideal joint family:

	Paternal Grandparents Parents	
Brothers and their wives	Ego : Wife	Unmarried sisters
Nephews Nieces	Sons and their wives	Unmarried daughters
	Grandchildren	

It is indeed difficult to locate family units in which five generations live together under the same roof. In the villages of Andhradesa, particularly Telangana, it is impossible to find a family in which all nuclear families of three generations share a common house. Among the higher castes of the Hindus such large joint families are still met with in the small towns and cities, but they are not often seen in the villages. In actual practice joint families in this part of the country are much smaller units, and often they consist of parents and their married sons and their wives and children, or of brothers and their wives and children. While joint families are regarded as ideal, it is common for sons to separate from their parents within a few years of their marriage. As a result of this separation they start as an elementary family, which comprises at first only the husband and the wife. This elementary family gradually becomes larger as children are added to it. When sons grow up, get married and continue to live with their wives in their parental home the unit can once again be classed as a joint family. In this connection case-histories of one hundred and twenty families from the village were examined. In 34% of the cases sons had separated from their parents within two years of marriage. Thirty-six per cent separated between two and three years after marriage. Separation took place after three, but within five years of marriage in 28% cases. Only 22% of the sons were still found to be living with their parents five years after their marriage. As most marriages are between adults, effective married

1: Dube E-5 (1951-62) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

life begins almost immediately after the marriage ceremony, or at the most within six months. For the purposes of the above analysis, the year when their effective married life started has been regarded as the year of marriage.

Further analysis of the case-histories reveals an almost uniform pattern of development in a majority of cases. For a year or so after his marriage a son continues to live with his parents. His wife also lives with him. Domestic quarrels and dissensions develop within this period and compel him to start thinking about separation. In some cases this takes place in the course of the next year; in others it may take three to five years. Those who can hold together for five years generally continue to live under the same roof peacefully for a much longer period. Nevertheless, separation is known to have taken place in some cases even after ten to fifteen years of living together.

A young married man separating from his parents or brothers generally maintains close connections with their family or families. However, as the immediate cause for separation is often a quarrel or an acute difference of opinion, for some time the separating families continue to have strained relations. They may not even be on speaking terms. With the passage of time much of the bitterness of the dispute wears off and cordiality gradually returns to the different branches of the same main family. When the relations between the main family and the seceding family are once again cordial, they start taking interest in each other's affairs and problems. Ceremonies, feasts and festivals bring them all together. Rites connected with the major crises of life are great occasions for family reunions. Particularly in the event of death old quarrels and misunderstandings are generally forgotten and all near-relations assemble for the last rites. In the rituals that follow the presence of all the branches of the family is regarded as obligatory, and the absence of anyone at such an occasion is bound to be viewed very seriously. This would almost always lead to a permanent breach of relations between the absenting unit and the other units of the same family.

In this context it is necessary to point out that an equivalent of the term 'family' is used in the community to denote three different social units, each varying from the other slightly. It may mean: (1) the elementary family or the 'house', (2) the extended family unit, or (3) a still larger group comprising the near-

J: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

kin on the paternal side. The composition of the family differs in different cases. In many cases it consists only of the husband and wife, their sons and unmarried daughters. In others one or both of the parents, unmarried brothers and unmarried sisters may also belong to this unit. Brothers and sons often establish their independent houses after marriage. In the same way, old parents may come to live with their son who had separated from them a decade or two earlier.

The *peddamanshi* or literally the 'big man' is the head of several family units which together constitute this extended family or allied families. In a still wider sense, family may include another category of near-kin who are one degree removed from the cluster of allied families.

In the diagram (overleaf) lines show the relatives who constitute the allied families, and dotted lines show the near-kin. Only unmarried girls belong to the family. On marriage they become members of their husband's family.

Each elementary family can be regarded as an independent unit of the extended family or the allied families. In everyday life it is practically free from the control of the other units of the allied families. Ordinarily these branches meet only on ceremonial and ritual occasions. Importance of the solidarity within the allied families is emphasized, and it is expected that any major decision will not be taken by any branch without consultation with the senior members of these allied families. Selling or buying land, starting litigation, obtaining large loans from a money-lender, leaving the village permanently for settling down in a different locality, and fixing the date and time for socio-religious ceremonies are among the subjects on which prior consultation with the senior members of the allied families is regarded as necessary. In any case the *peddamanshi* or head of these allied families should not be ignored. Often it is not difficult to get his permission and blessings; but people ignoring him inevitably come in for social censure. If the elders find the arrogance of the younger members too great they generally express their dissatisfaction and disapproval in their talk with the other people in the village. Their refusal to participate in a socio-religious ceremony of one of the branches of their family will cause a minor sensation in the village, and the comment of the society will generally be against the junior member who ignored the elders. If the affairs of any branch are in a

DIAGRAM SHOWING THE ALLIED FAMILIES AND THE NEAR-KIN

bad way, the elders of the allied families are expected to intervene. Scandals or dishonourable behaviour in one unit are likely to spoil the name of all the allied families, and as such tradition enjoins elders to advise, warn and even admonish the erring members. A young man given to excessive drinking, gambling or any similar vice would often be admonished by the elders of this extended family. If he cannot keep his wife under control, or if the quarrels of the two become very frequent and too public, the neighbours would convey the information to the elders of the extended family and expect them to use their initiative in putting things right. In all such cases they will be within their customary rights if they intervene. They can demand that their advice is heard and followed.

Within the family unit the eldest male is generally regarded as the head. His wife or the next senior male is given the second place. A respectful son very often describes his old widowed mother as the 'head' of the family. However, in many cases the *de facto* head of the family may be a son under whose guidance and supervision the land is cultivated or the craft or profession of the family is practised. Parents dominate the scene in their youth and early middle age. With approaching old age they gradually recede to the background. Nominally they remain the heads of the family, but their sons are left more or less free to conduct the management of the family property and profession as they like. As long as the father remains the real head of the family, the internal management of the family remains the charge of the mother. Sons are expected to obey her and the daughters-in-law are expected to carry out her instructions. Any failure or reluctance on the part of a daughter-in-law to carry out the wishes of her mother-in-law leads to constant quarrels and complications, and in many cases to ultimate separation. Between sons and daughters, as a rule, preference is shown to the former, but if the sisters have considerable seniority in age, their younger brothers are expected to respect and obey them.

In the village community of Shamirpet, which has considerable variations of caste and class, and significant differences in education and urban contacts, it is only natural to expect great variations in the family ideals and ethics of the different groups. In the themes of their idealizations, the different sections of the population show striking similarities; but in their attitudes and reactions

1: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

THE CHANGING SCENE

178 The social structure of the village is basically the same
621 although with every administrative or political change in the village there were several organizational changes. The primary unit in this structure is either the elementary family (maintaining close contacts with allied families) or it is a large joint family. The head of each family is known as the 'big man'. The next unit is the caste; or in the case of the Muslims, the group sharing a common religion. Each of these groups has a hereditary caste headman who represents it in the village council. Finally, this council consists of these headmen of the different castes, three Ganadi and the headman of the village who is its presiding officer. The following tables show the significant lines of variation in social organization, with special reference to family, caste and village council:

I—FAMILY

178 • 596

Then	*Now*
(1) Insistence on family solidarity and cohesion.	(1) Growth of individualism.
(2) Greater attachment to the soil and settlement.	(2) Migrations more frequent.
(3) Intra-family relations governed by regard for age and kinship status.	(3) Less regard for these traditional principles.

II—CASTE

178 564

Then	*Now*
(1) Occupational specialization on the basis of caste.	(1) Caste no longer the final and only determinant of occupation.
(2) Prohibition on inter-dining with some equal castes and all lower castes.	(2) Rules of inter-dining less rigid.
(3) Hierarchy and permanent distance between different castes.	(3) Mild protest against social hierarchy: some modification in actual practice.

III—VILLAGE COUNCIL

178 623

Then	*Now*
(1) Constituted on hereditary principles.	(1) Also admits people with 'achieved status'.
(2) Little outside intervention.	(2) Considerable outside pressure.
(3) Decisions generally accepted.	(3) Defiance or avoidance possible.

1: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

THE CHANGING SCENE

In the organization of the family the changed conditions and changing attitudes of the people have brought about some significant variations. It is difficult to present it statistically, but it could generally be said that in recent years the cohesion of the family has suffered on account of the growth of the spirit of individualism. Thereby family solidarity has been adversely affected. The people no longer have the same attachment for the soil of their settlement, and consequently mobility has increased. Among the younger people, especially among those who have had some education or urban contacts, the desire to go to the city is manifesting itself on an increasing scale. In making records of the biographies and general attitudes of the people, the contrast in the attitudes of the two steps of people emerged clearly. While the elderly and the middle-aged, mostly illiterate, complained about the inconveniences of village life, they still regarded it as the only way of life possible for *them*. On the other hand, the younger people seemed to idealize the city and its numerous attractions, and made no effort to conceal their contempt for the rustic ways of the village-folk. This change in attitudes and preferences has on the one hand encouraged migration to cities of young people who take up the small jobs there; and on the other it has generated disharmony and dissensions within the family causing considerable dislocation in the established principles according to which priorities and concessions went with age and kinship status. Service in the army, and city restaurants and the influence of the cinema tend to accentuate all this, but so far the number of young men with these tendencies is not more than 10% or 15% of the total in their age-group.

The caste system in the community presents only slight variations in some directions. As before, caste still retains its endogamous character. Similarly, caste continues to be a part of, and is sanctioned by, the traditional religion. However, its occupational character has undergone some change. People are now taking to new occupations. A goldsmith has opened a tea shop. Washermen and similar other castes are accepting menial jobs in the city. These are not their traditional occupations. Besides Muslims some non-Komti Hindus have set up general shops in the village; in the traditional system only Komtis could do so. Thus people are either giving up their traditional occupations, or they are taking to occupations which by tradition belong to some other castes.